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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: SECRETARY RICE'S STATEMENT ON TAIWAN'S UN  
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¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage December 27 on Taiwan's Central Election Commission (CEC)'s retreat from insistence on the "one-step" voting format at the upcoming legislative election; and on the alleged vote-buying cases in various legislative precincts. Taiwan's Ministry of Education's decision in putting a frame around the statue of Chiang Kai-shek in the Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall (formerly known as the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall) received half-page coverage in both the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" and the pro-unification "United Daily News."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed article by former DPP Chairman Yu Shyi-kun in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" described the U.S. opposition to Taiwan's UN bid referendum as yielding to China's pressure. An op-ed article in the pro-unification "United Daily News" said the U.S. is already a player, rather than a spectator, in the cross-Straits game after its recent series of comments on the referendum. Commentary by the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" noted that repairing U.S.-Taiwan relations will be the first priority for Taiwan's next president. A news analysis in "China Times" suggested that the U.S. is no longer interested in Chen Shui-bian's thinking and words. End Summary.

A) "Searching for the Founding Spirit of the U.S."

Former Chairman of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party Yu Shyi-kun, who is also the leading signer of the petition for a referendum on joining the UN under the name of "Taiwan," wrote in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation 720,000] (12/23):

"... I must say the U.S. opposition to Taiwan's referendum on the UN bid is shirking responsibility because the U.S. is incapable of dealing with the rise of China and the imbalance in the Asia-Pacific region. From the viewpoint of the Taiwan people, this is nothing but the U.S. yielding to China's pressure while ignoring the Taiwan's right to survive.

"... I want to tell our American friends, there is no return for Taiwan's democracy! Taiwan has been one of the most supportive countries of the U.S. The U.S. should be careful not to create one more anti-American nation in Asia just because of a temporary misjudgment. ..."

B) "The U.S. Exit Mechanism: U.S.-China Co-Management"

Professor Philip Y. M. Yang, Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University, commented in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (12/24):

"If the UN bid referendum is approved, its two worst effects will be (1) on Taiwan and (2) on cross-Straits relations. The internal effect will be that Taiwan becomes more fundamentalist. Supporters

can claim that Taiwan independence advocacy has won legitimacy by a majority vote. New waves of populism will surge with regard to sovereignty and identity issues. Taiwan will be seen as a trouble maker in East Asia and become a fundamentalist player in the region.

"... The serial U.S. criticism means the U.S. is already a player, not just a spectator. The U.S. has joined the game in the hope to influence the result of the UN bid referendum. If the U.S. is already in, then what is its 'exit mechanism'? Should the referendum be passed and the cross-Strait confrontation worsens, will the U.S. stay in the game and send aircraft carriers again? Or does Taiwan need to take care of itself? This, of course, depends on how the actual situation develops and changes. However, Rice's warning revealed a message.

"... If Beijing indicates that it does not intend to occupy Taiwan but to vanquish Taiwan in the political arena, then the U.S. exit mechanism may well be very clear: since the U.S. crisis management measures have failed to change the fundamentalist inclination of Taiwan, as long as Taiwan remains autonomous, and U.S. foreign relations, and military and democratic interests will not be seriously harmed, co-management by the U.S. and China of the cross-Strait situation will become more definite."

C) "No Need to Take Over the Mess"

A commentary by the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] said (12/24):

"In order to deal with the aftermath of the UN bid referendum, no matter who is next elected as president, his first priority must be to try to repair U.S.-Taiwan relations. That is, to make new promises on cross-Strait relations.

"With lessons learned from Chen Shui-bian, it is expected that  
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Washington is certain to ask Taiwan's new president for open pledges that are more concrete and more difficult to break. Unfortunately, the new president, who has tried hard to break away from Chen Shui-bian's shackles, will then get new chains from Washington and even Beijing. This will hurt not only Taiwan's dignity, but also our common interest.

"... In fact, things can be less complicated. As long as we disregard the false logic set by Chen Shui-bian and think about whether this referendum event is necessary or effective; then decide whether to take the referendum ballots and how to cast them, the answer will be very clear. If so, the people and the new president of Taiwan will not need to pay the high, but entirely unnecessary, price for clearing up the mess."

D) "Rice Remarks Are Like a Two-edged Sword. It's Hard to Tell Whether the Turnout Rate Will Be Reduced"

Journalist Chiang Hui-chen wrote in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (12/23):

"U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice attacked Taiwan's UN bid referendum as provocative. It has brought about polarized responses: the opposition party is worried while the ruling party secretly feels good. The phenomenon is really paradoxical and

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ironic.

"... However, Rice's remarks fully reflect the fact that the Americans no longer want to hear or care about Chen Shui-bian's thinking or words. The Bush administration, bogged down by international diplomatic issues starting four years ago, cannot spare any efforts to deal with the irresolvable cross-Strait turmoil. The stepping up of U.S. criticism indicates that the U.S. has no intention to open the door of communication for the rest of Bian's term. During this period, U.S.-Taiwan interactions will be an unprecedented period of [the U.S. making] frank remarks."

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